

The International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (**IFIMES**) in Ljubljana, Slovenia, regularly analyses events in the Middle East and the Balkans. **Dr Milan Jazbec**¹, member of the International Institute IFIMES, reflects and generalizes in his article “**The Integration Process as a Tool of Stability and Security in the Western Balkans**” the structural consequences of the 2004 EU enlargement, with particular emphasis on the Western Balkans and its perspectives. His article is published in its entirety.



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THE INTEGRATION PROCESS AS A TOOL OF STABILITY AND SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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INTRODUCTION

The state building process in the Western Balkans has undergone three big and complex stages during the last hundred years. Firstly, it was during and after World War I, when, from the chaos and conflicts that accompanied the dissolution of both the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, new states emerged. Secondly, it was during and after World War II, when above all the political and ideological map of the region changed decisively. And thirdly, it was following the end of the Cold War, when

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during and after the dissolution of former Yugoslavia (parallel with the opening of the then isolated Albania) conflicts prevailed again and dominantly marked the state building process.

Generally speaking, one could detect the following phases in the state building process in the region after the end of the Cold War:

- War or major conflict, leading to war;
- Peace agreement;
- Postconflict social reconstruction, leading to expression of integration ambition;
- Implementing this ambition (with various approaches, phases, speed and success, depending on a country in question).

There was an obviously different security environment, created along the constant matrix of des-integration and destruction, in all three stages, which heavily influenced the nature of the state building process. However, the integration process and its consequences, which produce constant and demanding structural dynamics, have decisively marked the last stage. Currently, there are three key elements, which compose this process, namely integration, security and development. They present a new concept of understanding trends in the post Cold War era, where both consuming and contributing take place rather simultaneously. Overall, social transformation includes on an interagency approach, and along horizontal as well as vertical axis, numerous actors, which continue to receive, integrate and to offer. The span of change is significant, decisive and encouraging.

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The region has – most probably for the first time in its history – a unique chance to achieve stability and security, through intensive participation in the integration process. The 2004 EU enlargement with its structural consequences presents a turning point in this development. We will have an analytical look at the current situation and its prospects through five theses.

FIVE THESES

First: Three major characteristics dominate the European security processes, namely complementarity, complexity and their complicated nature, all being the result of horizontal and vertical dynamics of interests of various actors as well as their output.

Complementarity is seen as the dominant feature. Lessons learned from past European history show that security could only be achieved through complementary activities of national and international subjects. If such an approach seemed to be primarily theoretical only a few years ago, the latest scope of activities and cooperation within major international organizations (the UN, NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe /CoE/) illustrates the way to proceed. At least two

reasons bring these players closer on the complementarity basis. Because of the limited pool of resources even the biggest actors cannot withstand an increasingly higher scale of activities. Also the complex nature of contemporary security threats and conflicts shows that it is practically impossible for a single player to develop the whole spectrum of mechanism for security management. Different approaches, various sets of mechanisms and networking must be combined and joined.

Complexity derives from the presence of numerous security players on various vertical and horizontal levels. The presence of the UN as a global security player is accompanied by NATO, the EU, the OSCE and the CoE, which occupy different horizontal positions on a same but lower vertical level. Proceeding down the scale we would meet on the next level, for example, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Višegrad Group, the Regional Cooperation Council etc. Many participants at various horizontal levels (global, regional, paneuropean, subeuropean, local etc.) form a security matrix, which is the most significant way how security as a goal could be achieved. This includes a variety of players and strengthens a multilateral approach. The matrix as a living model shows flexibility and offers the framework in particular for local players to emerge and fit in.

The *complicated* nature of these processes seems to a certain extent to be the quite natural outcome of criss-crossing the first two characteristics. Generally speaking, this includes above all management of the relations resulting from:

- a) The overlapping of NATO and the EU members.
- b) The non-Nato EU members and vice versa.
- c) Relations of all member countries towards applicant/candidate countries to both organizations.
- d) Relations to third countries (PfP members and aspirants, countries with which both organizations have an institutionalized dialogue etc.).
- e) The decisive role of relations between the EU, the USA and the Russian Federation.

This sometimes produces non-transparent activities and unnecessary overlapping, which is not always easy to overcome, as well as opens maneuvering space for non-integration interests. Such situations should be avoided as a matter of a clear and necessary consensus on a general level, while introducing rules of engagement on lower levels. This would be even more important to bear in mind since European security processes form a fundamental part of the integration process as a whole.

Second: The integration process is the key driving force of change and progress in Europe. It results in a broad, dynamic and complex process, where participation of governmental, non-governmental and private sector is necessary.

This has fundamentally changed Europe and its state system, known from the past centuries, which was a constant hostage of war ambitions of political elites striving for military and economic dominance. Therefore, the integration process, once it has been adopted, works to the benefit of broader populations, improving their living conditions and expanding their overall opportunities. In addition, it stimulates and when necessary also forces political elites to move along different set of values and principles of policy behaviour, namely in an open, transparent manner, with interconnected, interdependent and bound together approach. Such a change does not come by itself, but is a combination of the results of changing environment and influence of public opinion, enabled and supported by the media.

One could also claim this is the point where the post Cold War approach and its notion are being put to test: cooperation, trust and transparency. Enriched with solidarity, this is the formula which not only the EU and NATO but also other organizations try to put forward to the new members and aspirant / candidate countries. This change is from one point of view stimulated by the integration process and from another point of view it effects further provision of security and stability through integration. It is also possible to say that the change itself reflects / is being reflected in a safer and more secure international environment, which directly results in further development and well-being of nations and people.

The EU accession process presents an overall structural transformation of a country, following the *acquis communautaire* and focusing primarily on structures and values. The free passage of goods, services, capital and people as well as knowledge is a stimulus, which attracts broader populations. Therefore, political elites have to create conditions where such goals would be achievable. This is of primary importance in the countries of the Western Balkans, since there is a shortage of political programmes, which would compete for enhancing change along the integration process and its benchmarks. Also, the EU from its side shall proceed firmly towards the visa liberalization for the Western Balkans societies, enabling above all the young population and business community to reach a higher level of mobility and competitiveness in comparison with their counterparts around Europe.

The efficiency of the integration process lies also with its enlargement. For this reason the enlargement policy shall be supported and stimulated both in the EU and in the Western Balkans. The former has to promote it, since the enlargement process is also the continuation of the European peace project that started right after the World War II, and the latter has to grab the opportunity with more enthusiasm, for the sake of all generations. This would further transform our societies and decrease the level of uncertainty, which we live in.

Third: The Western Balkans countries are firmly bound in a network of various integration instruments, which have a necessary potential to

bring the region deeper in the overarching integration interdependency as well as away from historical disruption.

Currently the region is practically part of the Stabilization and Association Agreements network, which has been primarily accomplished during the few previous Presidencies of the EU Council, the Slovene one in particular. Spanning from the two candidate countries to the country at the very beginning of the whole process, the intra-regional dynamics has reached a level, where during the next mandate of the European Parliament a decisive break-through could be accomplished. Both the EU and the countries of the region share a huge mutual responsibility for this endeavour.

However, there is still a strong need that the countries concerned definitely turn away from conflict and reach for cooperation as well as from various forms of aggression towards consensus building. History shall not be forgotten, but it also shall not stimulate the regeneration of old samples of political behaviour anymore. The most important basis of the whole Euro-Atlantic integration process, stemming from its six decades of experience, derives from exactly this message. One could present this finding with even more enhanced and broader wording: the structural and substantial importance of the integration process, which has transformed the European state system, presents the most efficient tool for stability and security in the Western Balkans.

As far as the future development of state building in the Western Balkans as a part of its integration ambition is concerned, there is a clear need for:

- Definite, full and complete Europeanization of the region.
- Elaboration of the EU requirements supported with clear perception what this means not only for region's elites but in particular for its population and individuals.
- Expressing of the needs of the region.

Hence, a clear, worked out and efficient approach for each country and for the region as a whole should be developed. Enlarging the EU and NATO, through their tools, is the final structural goal. This goal would, after it has been achieved, turn into a means for further development of the region as an indispensable part of the European entity.

The security of the whole region is continuously being enhanced, strengthened and transformed. One could follow this principle from the provision of hard security primarily during the late 90-ties to the provision of soft security afterwards. Hard security is only one of the elements or aspects around which flexible, creative and firm security matrix has been developing. Security is being spread through institution building process and progressed – to say so – along the premises of introducing, understanding, implementing and enhancing soft security. The integration process

further cements soft security, what would mean de-securitization of security in its traditional, Cold War approach and meaning. This matrix is highly sensible because of its complexity and interdependence of its elements as well as of the regional warfare tradition, being to a large extent the result of outside interventions.

Fourth: The Western Balkans countries have to proceed along the integration compass with more structural ambition and firm devotion. The integration process stakeholders have to encourage them with much more invention, belief and above all with a concrete and efficient approach.

The integration frame has been clearly set up quite long ago, although being modified all the time. For the Western Balkan countries this perception has been outstandingly visualized after the two previous EU enlargements, namely in 2004 and 2007. Since then the region has been practically embraced by the integration philosophy and its practical implications.

From one point of view it is obvious and known what the membership criteria are and how to fulfill them. There are examples for this all around the region and these experiences are being shared across the region as well. From another point of view it is also known what the main current challenges for the countries of the region on their way towards the EU are: the fight against corruption and organized transnational crime, the rule of law, institution building, local ownership, enhanced regional cooperation and full cooperation with the ICTY, all of this regardless of the will of parts of their political elites. If the integration ambition was initiated as an impetus from the outside, it could plant roots also in a reflection of local needs and aspiration.

These processes have always been a two way street in the history of the integration: clear expectations from the stakeholder should meet the fulfillment of asked merits and given promises from the aspirant. This feeds the momentum of the process and its dynamics as well as balances both the application and the expectation management. Anyway, it still looks as if the expression of integration ambition and implementing of this ambition harbour at different sides of the same river. Accordingly, a more structured ambition and firm devotion would be appreciable for a faster advancing along the integration path.

Also, more structured and convincing encouragement should come from the integration process stakeholders in general. They should be constantly aware that it has been the enlargement of the integration ambition, which has strengthened Europe and brought it peace, stability and prosperity. The current global financial crisis should not overshadow this historical experience. Moreover, the ambition of the EU to finally go global should not only strengthen its institutional reform, but

also revitalize the enlargement ambition. Both the EU as well as the Western Balkans deserve it.

Fifth: Slovenia has much potential to contribute to the region's further development decisively. It should upgrade, complement and deepen its approach, in particular with combining economic exchange, development cooperation and cultural-educational activities on a larger scale.

In May 2004 Slovenia, together with nine other countries, became the new member of the EU. These five years were an opportunity to deepen structural adaptation into integration process, which has additionally been strengthened and proved by holding the EU Presidency in the first part of the 2008. This has also upgraded the Slovene responsibility for the Western Balkans.

Slovenia has to press for a visa liberalization system for the countries of the Western Balkans. Citizens cannot be victims of their political elites and their inclinations to either fulfillment or not of the membership criteria. Social mobility, which drives the integration process, cannot be hold back because of this. Along with this goes also keeping Western Balkans issues high and constantly on the EU agenda. Additionally, offering and expressing constant political support as well as lobbying inside the EU and its member countries should contribute to better understanding of the region within the integration, but also for better understanding of the EU in the region. This would be the best way to substitute both the enlargement and commitment fatigue with responsible integration enthusiasm.

Moreover, various approaches should be combined and complemented, making *via facti* their output much more substantial than so far. Extensive and deep economic exchange and commercial activities should be structurally accompanied by development cooperation programmes as well as by focused and broad cultural-educational projects, all of this at a much larger scale. More or less parallel multi-track activities would gain on efficiency and synergy in both directions. Cultural centers should be mutually established and direct cooperation among local partners (municipalities, schools, NGOs etc.) enhanced. The role of extensive and comprehensive public diplomacy has hardly been touched upon.

The Slovene voice is being listened to both among the member countries and among the countries of the region discussed; therefore its role of integration promoter has still much to gain and the understanding of the key role of the integration process for stability and security, too.

CONCLUSION

Today the integration process is undoubtedly the key driving force of change and progress in Europe. It consists primarily of a cornerstone importance of the enlargements of both the EU and NATO, supported by a variety of other integration impulses. Hence, the Euro-Atlantic integration is a lesson learned as well as the recipe for the Western Balkans, which takes this path, while the speed at which individual countries move to this goal depends on the success of their reform efforts.

Integration membership ambition starts as a goal, which converts itself, once it is achieved, into a means of providing stability, security and development. This has been the most obvious and convincing lesson learned from the so far enlargements and their stakeholders, Slovenia included. It also forms the essence of the dual enlargement from 2004. The series of enlargements of both organizations after the end of the Cold War show that membership in NATO is gained first, while the EU one follows later on. Experiences also explain that, generally speaking, a decade is needed for a functional and efficient transformation that would fit within the integration frame. But it is the moment of achieving membership, when real business starts and when goals convert to means. Only in such a case, the integration tool provides stability and security.

The combination of both the EU and NATO enlargements present an opportunity for spreading and cementing stability and security, where countries are bound in a flexible, efficient and developing network of values and structures, enhancing and deepening the provision of hard security with ever-growing soft security. Diversified dynamics among here presented security players and within here elaborated context origins from numerous relations and initiatives all leading to the common goal, i.e. the creation of a secure and safe Europe. The more these processes are interconnected, interdependent and complementary, the more chances they have to become global ones.

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